

Tom McGrath

Electra



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Born in Rutherglen, Scotland, in 1940, Tom McGrath is a poet, a journalist and a musician. Beginning with his plays *Laurel and Hardy* (1976) and *The Hardman* (1977), his popularity and reputation as a playwright has become international. His most recent work *The Dream Train* (written for Magnetic North Theatre Company) was read in French translation at the Avignon Theatre Festival (2001) and produced in Finland and in Germany. Tom McGrath now lives in Kingskettle, Fife, Scotland, where he is currently completing a new stage play called *My Old Man*, again for Magnetic North Company, and a radio play about Thomas Mann for Bona Broadcasting and the BBC. *My Old Man* is scheduled to premier at Glasgow's Tron Theatre in September 2005. This version of *Electra* was first presented in Glasgow's Fruitmarket in 2000.



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by Tom McGrath



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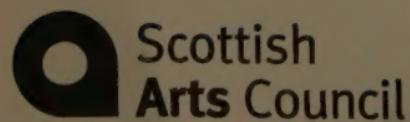
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Introduction

I made this version of *Electra* for the Glasgow-based theatre company, Theatre Babel, who, with the help of the Scottish Arts Council and special lottery funding, launched a scheme to get three contemporary playwrights to do new versions of Greek tragedies for Scottish audiences of today.

The other playwrights involved were David Grieg and Liz Lochhead. The choice of plays from the wide range of Greek tragedies was up to us. I chose *Electra* because I liked the idea of a play so strongly focussed on a female character and because her defiant resistance to a powerful self-appointed ruler brought to mind Aung San Su Kyi's political struggle in Malumar (Burma). At the time when I was working on the play, Su Kyi was under house arrest in Burma, loyal to her people and the memory of her father, who, like Electra's father, Agamemnon, was assassinated when she was young.

There the resemblance ended. Aung San Su Kyi was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, an award Electra with her depressed and hostile attitudes would be unlikely to be shortlisted for. At that time, however, Glasgow newspapers carried a story about a heroin addict prostitute who had mugged one of her clients. Again the comparison could not be pushed too far but in my mind the royal palace of the play became a modern multi-storey city hotel and Electra's hard qualities seemed to be echoed by the harsh desperation of the streetgirls of the present.

Many different stage versions of the Electra story existed in the ancient Greek world, with those of Sophocles and Euripides particularly well known. Though the overall feel of Euripides work is more modern and realistic, I was drawn, nonetheless, to base my play on Sophocles' version which puts such a strong emphasis

on familial relationships. Clashes between Electra and her mother, Clytemnestra, taunting talk between Electra and her sister, Chrysothemis, moving moments when Electra and her brother, Orestes, rediscover one another – these are a substantial part of the play's main action, and it is clear how important such relationships were to Sophocles and the audiences for his plays. As a father to four daughters, I could appreciate that.

What also drew me to Sophocles' version of *Electra* was the feeling for death in his work. There is, of course, the murder of Agamemnon by Aegisthus, Clytemnestra's lover, frequently brought before our eyes by the bitter words of Electra. It's an animated violence which we recognise from our own times. But there is a stiller sense of death which seems to sit inside the very objects of the play as if in its atmosphere. There is the axe used to chop Agamemnon down, the urn said to contain the ashes of Orestes. And at all times, a dark glimmer in the background, there is the crypt which houses the dead king's tomb. Sophocles lets his shadowed meaning emerge gradually in measured verse. It all felt to me most ancient and solemn, a deep dark ritual with a power to it.

And I was fascinated by what seemed to be the natural way for the characters in the play to be in their world and behave. For example, they pray. When Orestes arrives in his native city that is the first thing he does, he prays. When Clytemnestra dreams of Agamemnon, she prays. Electra herself prays to the Gods of darkness. Always they pray with simple directness, talking straight to their God without hesitations. It reminded me of what I'd read about early Celtic Christianity where God is related to as immediately present in daily life. They prayed. They believed in a reality which revealed itself to them through dreams. Likewise the audience for the play. It is clear from the numerous references to myths and Gods that Sophocles assumed they were familiar with the same background of stories and legends. Simply by

mentioning a nightingale, for instance, he can bring a whole story into the minds of the audience. Electra is seen by them as similar to the princess whom the Gods imprisoned inside the bird and whose voice is still heard in its song, lamenting her dead children. She is not identical with her, for Electra has no children, but her sorrow has the same lost quality, and is heard in the dark of night. The audience for Sophocles' play would feel all of this as a reality. The nightingale has a symbolic power which places Electra in the eternal realm of myths and Gods. Writing for today's audiences, it is difficult for a playwright to create the same effects. Nonetheless I was drawn to it – the whole feel and notion of a magical universe appealed to me. I hoped somehow to recreate it in my adaptation of the play, yet also to maintain the sense of specific humanity – real people in real time – with which Sophocles presents us.

Time and eternity: the theatrical style of the play reflects the relationship between them. The members of the chorus, for example, are able to take an overall view of the action as it occurs in an invisible universe which is beyond ordinary time: 'Unless I am mistaken, retribution is at hand . . .' Often they act as a guide to the audience, pointing up the significance of events. Then, too, they endorse Electra, telling others to take heed of her because 'she speaks in piety'. But even as they do this they are like spectators who have gathered in the streets, witnessing Electra's ongoing resistance from day to day. Her position gains its strength from them, just as Aung San Su Kyi's does from the Buddhist population of Burma. Aegisthus has to be careful in the way he handles Electra. The people are watching.

In a sense the chorus, as I have presented them here, are more like the chorus in a play by Euripides, where they are more 'visible' – seen and heard by the other characters, than in a play by Sophocles, where they tend to represent 'invisible' forces, links between human beings and the workings of fate and the Gods, something like angels. But at times I would have liked to

present them as tourists, with video cameras at the ready to record Electra's denunciation of the city.

Other slight departures from Sophocles came into it. On the whole, I observed the 'unities' of time, space and action which help to give Greek tragedy so much of its intensity and cathartic effect. In sketching in the story of Orestes, however, I allowed the characters – Orestes, Pylades, the Tutor – to be seen in a different location. This was partly out of consideration for modern audiences, whose tolerance of lengthy speeches describing offstage action is bound to be more limited than the Greeks who watched and heard Sophocles. It also helped me bring out the magical 'inner' world in which the play is taking place. Orestes hears Electra's message in the song of a bird. Before taking action, he consults with the Oracle at Delphi. I felt that this consultation should be seen by a modern audience likely to be less used to such a procedure. (It's also interesting to notice that the Oracle at Delphi is traditionally considered to be female – an old woman speaking in riddles which the priestesses convey to the questioner.)

I wanted to make other changes – to show Aegisthus within the palace, for instance – but the director of the *Babel* production took a more 'purist' line on Greek tragedy than I did, and there were practicalities with regard to the set to be considered. Eventually, too, I simply got carried away by the brilliance of Sophocles' craftsmanship, and the way in which the scenes follow on from one another with such telling effect. I felt I could only put my own thoughts aside and allow the play to happen.

One major problem remained, however. I could not agree with the play's message. Electra's desire for revenge for her father's murder is never seriously challenged, even by characters, like her mother and sister, who disagree with the stance she has adopted. The killing of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra is at all times seen as

the conclusion towards which the play proceeds. Once that has happened, Agamemnon's death is avenged and order is restored to the kingdom – justice is done. I could not agree with this. My own background in politics, which includes an immersion in the theory and practice of non-violence, together with what I have observed in the contemporary world caused me to emphasise those lines of the chorus which say that 'violence begets violence'.

This was a contradiction which I never did resolve. Electra's story, whilst full of heroic endurance and resistance to tyranny, becomes eventually one we must avoid. Aung San Su Kyi's non-violence of the present has more relevance for us. Electra ends in the bloodshed of revenge. In this there is no triumph or resolution, and this unfortunately makes it a play for our times, a ritual which continues to need to be performed. It is a scream in the night.

Tom McGrath, 2005

Characters

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| ELECTRA: | the daughter of the murdered King Agamemnon. |
| ORESTES: | her brother. |
| CHRYSOTHEMIS: | her sister. |
| CLYTEMNESTRA: | her mother. |
| AEGISTHUS: | her mother's lover. |
| PYLADES: | freind of Orestes. |
| TUTOR: | tutor to Orestes. |
| ORACLE | |
| CHORUS | |
| VOICE OF AGAMEMNON | |
| GUARDS | |

Setting

Outside the Palace of Pelops at Mycenae.

Scene 1

CHORUS: There's a curse on the House of Atreus which sprang
from a dying man's lips.

A curse such as this has a strength to it
and the mischief it causes
is forever unjust.

So found our great King Agamemnon,
returning from years of war
to discover his Queen, Clytemnestra,
in the arms of Aegisthus
and ready for gore.

Before he could strike
that pair struck him down,
then, with false faces,
proceeded to mourn.

We, his subjects
were simply told
he'd died from his wounds
borne in battles abroad,
and we might have believed them,
simply taken their word,
had it not been for
Electra . . .

Stage darkens.

ELECTRA: Come Gods of Darkness.

I need your powers.

Who's that there? Orestes?

No its just the nightingale.

You told me about it, father.

I remember.

It has the soul of a princess in it, you said, mourning her dead son.

The Gods put her there because her lamenting annoyed them.

You told me about it, father, before you went to war.

After that you were always at war.

I longed for your return.

But it would have been better if you'd died when you were away – some Trojan spear had got you and your body was buried on a foreign shore.

Never did come home.

That would have been best.

Because then you would not have had to look into your wife's eyes – those treacherous eyes that led you to the spot – the spot where they hacked you down.

She screams

ELECTRA: Your death was blamed on battle wounds.

It was as much as you could do to get back home, according to them.

According to them you only came home in order to die.

Everything was according to them.

They gave you just a short period of mourning.

Without great fuss.

Clytaemnestra said that's how you wanted things.

A few months later she married Aegisthus, her partner in crime, and he took up your sceptre and your crown.

No-one dared say anything.

No-one protested.

No-one said a word because they were all too scared.

CHORUS: Violence begets violence.

Power snatched unjustly is always held in fear.

ELECTRA: I am the only one who mourns you now, father,
and goes on mourning you publicly – endlessly,
and I am like that nightingale, I will not cease from mourning
for as long as there's sun in the daytime sky and there are
stars by night,
I will not cease – not until Orestes returns
to avenge your death and reclaim your throne.

Orestes? Where are you? What do you look like now? Are you
taller than I am? Where are you? What are you doing? Orestes
Can you hear me?

I am calling out to you.

I need you here to help me

I am not strong enough on my own.

Come home. Do you hear me?

Come home. Come home.

Do you hear me, Orestes?

I am calling to you.

Oh you Gods

take my words to him . . .

Scene 2

**In another part of Greece. ORESTES with his friend PYLADES
and their TUTOR, an old man. Sound of bird calling. Daylight.**

ORESTES: That bird, did you hear it? It seemed to be talking to
me. (**The bird calls again.**) There it goes again. Do you hear
it? Such a strange feeling – it's as if it is talking to me.

TUTOR: What do you think it was trying to say?

ORESTES: It was something in my head playing tricks on me.

TUTOR: If you heard a voice then you heard a voice. It might have come from inside you but it had to be sung out by a bird for you to notice it. So what was it singing?

ORESTES: I don't know.

TUTOR: You must do.

ORESTES: I couldn't make it out.

TUTOR: You're hiding it from yourself. If you heard a bird speaking then it was speaking what is already in your mind. What did it say?

ORESTES: Come home! Come home! Come home!

TUTOR: Electra again.

ORESTES: Perhaps. But I don't want to go home. Not yet. It's too soon. You say Electra saved my life, but I don't even remember her. What should I do? You're my teacher. You tell me.

TUTOR: This is no small matter. First we must go to Delphi. We need the blessings of the Gods and the riddles of the priestess, the voice of the oracle to guide us. No more soaking in the sun. We'll soon be on the hoof.

Yes, Pylades; we are going to travel. You ready? (**PYLADES nods**) And you, Orestes?

ORESTES: I am ready.

Scene 3

Delphi. The voice of the ORACLE sounds from the darkness.

ORACLE: What's your name, boy?

ORESTES seems confused. The TUTOR urges him on.

TUTOR: Say your name.

ORESTES: But it's not speaking to me.

ORACLE: What's your name, boy? You who will soon be a man.

ORESTES: Orestes.

ORACLE: Orestes. Come closer, Orestes.

TUTOR: Go forward.

ORESTES: Aren't you coming with me?

TUTOR: You must approach the oracle alone.

ORESTES moves forward.

ORACLE: Listen carefully.

Not by raising armies
does the battle conclude.
An urn full of ashes
is misunderstood.
The King's son proceeds
by subterfuge.

The axe shaft is waiting
for vengeful hands.

The axe head
longs to fall
and fell
the foul usurper.

Her son's hands touch her.
Why does she scream?
Who killed the King?
The Queen.

Who kills the Queen?

Orestes.

PYLADES goes forward and puts his arms around **ORESTES'** shoulder **ORESTES** is stunned by what has happened to him.

TUTOR: The smoke from the stones has confused him.

They move away from the ORACLE. **ORESTES** regains his senses.

ORESTES: The oracle told me I must kill my mother.

TUTOR: The main thing is to reclaim your father's throne. The axe is waiting, she said. And not by force but subterfuge. Well, I'm sure we can manage that. Come on. . . (they exit).

Scene 4

In the necropolis of ELECTRA'S mind, daybreak. Various objects are illuminated, one by one – the bars of a gate, an urn, the dark hole that is the entrance to a tomb, a bunch of flowers, an axe. The figure of ELECTRA moves among them. She kneels centre stage. She looks upwards.

ELECTRA: Father! The sun's come up, father. See how it lights the entrance to your tomb.

I beat my breasts. Beat them till they bleed, father. Sore. very sore. Not as sore as your death, father . . .

She makes a weeping sound, allowing the sorrow of her mourning to come out as a sound, a slightly highpitched sound, prolonged, full of sadness, reaching out to many ears.

ELECTRA: Only my hateful bed can tell
the tears I've shed
in this palace of cruelty
each dark night since you are gone,
Agamemnon!

(The sun rises.)

Light. Holy Light!
Light sky rising
above the earth,
how often have you shone on me
still wearing
my mournful cries
as you arise
each morning?

ELECTRA remains in prayer to the sun.

Scene 5

Mycenae. Enter ORESTES, TUTOR and PYLADES.

TUTOR: Well, there you are. The sun's come up especially for you, Orestes. Behold the land of Argos where you were born. You've waited long enough to cast your eyes on it again. Yonder's the temple of Heres, and that's the market place which bears the name Apollo. It was here your father came home to. And there, the Palace of Pelops. Its walls stained with blood. Don't look too long. There's no time to waste. Already the birds are singing. Soon it will be daylight and people will be coming out from their houses. They'll take one look at us and be suspicious. What is your plan?

ORESTES: First I will make an offering at my father' grave.

TUTOR: But silently, unseen.

ORESTES: Pylades, my good friend, whilst I do that, you must find the bronze urn the oracle has foretold and which you, tutor, say is hidden there in the burial ground. And you, old man, my teacher, please will you go down in among them and find out how things are with the people – what is going on.

TUTOR nods and exits.

ORESTES: (**ORESTES** prays) My native earth!

You Gods of Argus! Accept me back and help me prosper!
House of my Father, make me welcome. Give me your blessing. I am sent by the gods to purge you of evil and make you pure. Don't drive me away. Let me enter into what is mine. I will rebuild you.

ORESTES and **PYLADES** exit.

Scene 6

Outside the palace. **AEGISTHUS** crosses the stage with guards. **ELECTRA** calls out at him. He glares at her. Exits.

ELECTRA: Murderer! (**She breaks down into tears.**) Agamemnon's murderer.

CHORUS: Tears won't bring your father back, nor beating your breast bloody. You can't go on weeping and wailing forever. You mustn't. Its doing you no good, Electra. Only does you harm. Your father would not have liked you to torture yourself like this. Try to forget it, Electra. Put it behind you.

ELECTRA: Can't put it behind me. Can't forget. Saw him die before my eyes. I'd have to harden my heart to turn away from that,

and that would do me no good, no good at all.

CHORUS: Self-obsessed. You're not the only one to suffer. Iphigenia never did return from the war, and think of your poor sister, Chrysothemis.

ELECTRA: My poor sister? Chrysothemis? Poor? She doesn't look to me like she's doing much suffering. Just give her an earring or a bauble for her hair! She's easily distracted.

CHORUS: Young girls are like that.

ELECTRA: Young girl next? She's not a girl. Yes she's a virgin but she's not a girl. It's just how she dresses. (She hears a sound. Startled.)

Who's there?

Enter CHRYSOTHEMIS, carrying flowers. ELECTRA blocks her way.

ELECTRA: Going somewhere, Chrysothemis?

CHRYSOTHEMIS: Electra!

ELECTRA: Where are you going with all those flowers?

CHRYSOTHEMIS: Never mind that. I knew I'd find you here, outside the gates. Did you not see Aegisthus leave?

ELECTRA: Yes. Early this morning. I shouted at him as he was going. Gave him a wave. Too much to hope that he has gone for good, that man never did anything for good.

CHRYSOTHEMIS: He will be back by evening, and when he does return you must not be here outside the gates of the palace.

ELECTRA: I will be wherever I want to be. He will not rule me.

CHRYSOTHEMIS: Oh, my dear sister, you don't know the risk you run.

ELECTRA: I think I do.

CHRYSOTHEMIS: Last night I heard them.

ELECTRA: Poor you.

CHRYSOTHEMIS: You screamed in the night and it disturbed them.

ELECTRA: Good!

CHRYSOTHEMIS: He was shouting at her and it was all about you.

Electra what he plans to do to you is not to kill you – she would never allow that, nor would the people of this city – it is too great a risk – but he says he will imprison you, in the darkest dungeon where no light can penetrate and no-one can see or hear you ever again. He says he will do it today unless you return to normal life within the palace bounds.

ELECTRA: Normal life within the palace? You are pathetic. Chrysanthemis. Look at you. Baubles in your hair, rings on your fingers and in your ears. What's the good of rings when he won't let anyone marry you in case you have any offspring? How can you be satisfied with painting your nails when their hands are stained with our father's blood?

CHRYSOTHEMIS: Today, he said, Electra, just before nightfall he will have you seized and buried away. Is that what you want?

ELECTRA: What does my mother want?

CHRYSOTHEMIS: She is going to come and talk to you, to have one last chance at changing your mind. Do what she says, Electra, please, I beg you. I couldn't bear to think of you incarcerated in a dungeon down there beneath the palace. It would upset me so.

ELECTRA: Oh, you poor dear.

CHRYSOTHEMIS: Come back to the palace. She will treat you better than she did before. She still loves you, Electra . . .

ELECTRA: What does she know of love? And how can you live with yourself cow-towing to them? Join with me. Chrysothemis. Still Orestes has not returned. It is up to us.

CHRYSOTHEMIS: I'm going. I'm not listening to you anymore. Let me past.

ELECTRA: Just where are you going with all those flowers? You still haven't said.

CHRYSOTHEMIS: They are for father's grave. Mother sent me with them.

ELECTRA: Suddenly she's sending flowers? Why?

CHRYSOTHEMIS: She had a dream.

ELECTRA: Of Agamemnon? What did she dream?

CHRYSOTHEMIS: She dreamt he was there, returned to the palace, and was standing there beside her. He snatched up the sceptre which was once his but now Aegisthus holds, and he planted it in the fireplace where a great tree grew out of it, a tree that gave shelter to the whole of Argus.

ELECTRA: A tree that gave shelter to the whole of Argus! Was there any more to it?

CHRYSOTHEMIS: That's all that I know.

ELECTRA: How do you know it?

CHRYSOTHEMIS: She confessed it all at the shrine of the sun god. Then she came with the flowers and told me to put them on Agamemnon's grave.

ELECTRA: Oh, Chrysothemis!

CHRYSOTHEMIS: Yes?

ELECTRA: Dear sister.

CHRYSOTHEMIS: What is it?

ELECTRA: Don't let these offerings get anywhere near our father's tomb. All law and piety forbid it. She who was his murderer! Agamemnon needs no offerings from her.

CHRYSOTHEMIS: It's only flowers. And what will I do? I can't take them back to her. I daren't.

ELECTRA: Bury them, Throw them on the winds so that none of them shall reach him. Or have them kept preserved until she dies, when they can be her welcoming bouquet to hell. What makes her think any gifts from her would be acceptable to him? After they'd killed him, they could not get her to stop. You forget that I saw it. With my own eyes I saw it. Her gifts won't win her any forgiveness. That's just not possible.

CHRYSOTHEMIS: But Electra.

ELECTRA: Forget the flowers. Go to our father's tomb and make a different offering – two locks of hair, one from you and one from me. And give him this piece of cloth . . .

CHRYSOTHEMIS: The sign you are a virgin.

ELECTRA: Give him yours too, if it pleases you. Let him know our fate – condemned to be barren by his assassins. Make these offerings, poor, unadorned, and, as you make them, kneel upon his grave, beseech him. Our father, say, in the world below, look with favour on our pure offerings. Give us help against our enemies. Bring Orestes back to us so that one day we may make you offerings of glorious revenge. (Pause) In the meantime these humble offerings will be acceptable to him, I know, because it is certain that Clytemnestra's dream did come from him. Do you doubt it?

CHRYSOTHEMIS: I just don't know. I am confused by all this. I wish things were more simple. Like they were once; when we were children. Mother gave me the flowers, I thought at least it was . . . better than nothing.

ELECTRA: Give honour to yourself and to me, and to our father, and do not deliver these flowers.

CHRYSOTHEMIS hesitates. She turns to the CHORUS.

CHRYSOTHEMIS: What should I do?

CHORUS: My child, if you are wise, you will do as she bids – for, despite her harshness, she speaks in piety,

CHRYSOTHEMIS: Very well. No flowers. But, oh my friends, I beg you keep it secret. If Clytemnestra gets to hear of this, I shall pay severely.

CHRYSOTHEMIS exits.

ELECTRA: Such a dream. Can you divine it?

CHORUS: Unless we are mistaken, retribution is at hand.

Her shadow's falling over the length of our sad land.

She's coming and she brings with her a power invincible – our true King's not forgotten nor the axe forgot the blow.

Come swift, come strong, come ambush, come in might the Gods' revenge. Against those powerful fuckers who for lust did his life end.

Come that we might feel confidence the omen's not in vain – for evildoers they must pay and justice come again.

CLYTEMNESTRA enters.

CLYTEMNESTRA: I knew I'd find you here.

ELECTRA: Good.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Outside the palace gates again.

ELECTRA: So it would seem.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Remember that I am a creature just like you.

ELECTRA: You are?

CLYTEMNESTRA: Yes. We are both women. We both have feelings. We are both capable of making mistakes – doing one thing one day but thinking differently another. As is everyone who has ever lived or ever shall.

ELECTRA: Or died.

CLYTEMNESTRA: And, no matter what, we must be prepared to forgive each other our mistakes.

ELECTRA: Some things are beyond forgiveness.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Electra, my dear daughter, somehow we must learn to love each other again.

ELECTRA: Impossible.

CLYTEMNESTRA: I am your mother. Does that mean nothing to you?

ELECTRA: You had at least the chance to be a mother. I have had no such chance. Thanks to my mother.

CLYTEMNESTRA: There are so many things you do not understand. I am older than you.

ELECTRA: And hopefully that much nearer to the grave.

CLYTEMNESTRA: (angry) You are such an impossible girl. You always were. Very well. You force me to tell you something I had hoped to spare you from about your beloved father, that great man.

ELECTRA: Say nothing against him. You did enough to take his life. Don't now try to take his reputation.

CLYTEMNESTRA: At least you must take the opportunity to understand more clearly how things are.

ELECTRA: What can you tell me that I don't already know?

CLYTEMNESTRA: About Iphigenia.

ELECTRA: My other sister, Iphigenia.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Do you remember her?

ELECTRA: Yes. But only just. She went off with Agamemnon to the war, but she did not return.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Did you never wonder what happened to her?

ELECTRA: You told me she had wed. She lived now on some faraway shore.

CLYTEMNESTRA: I told you that to save your feelings.

ELECTRA: Huh!

CLYTEMNESTRA: She did not return because she was dead. Of all three of you, my daughters, she was the one who resembled me most, and he took her from me. Did you never wonder why she had gone to sea with your father and his army in the first place?

ELECTRA: In those days I trusted whatever you told me.

CLYTEMNESTRA: He tricked me, Electra. Sent word to me that Iphigenia should join the fleet at Aulis there to be betrothed. Her husband to be? None other than the great Achilles. A legendary name. I did not hesitate. Such a match meant much to all of us. Not only would Iphigenia have a fine, strong husband, but various powers would be joined together. More than two people would be united. In their marriage bed, whole kingdoms would merge. I waited with bated breath to hear if I

should join them for the ceremony, but no news came, until a few months later, the sorry story of her death.

ELECTRA: How did she die?

CLYTEMNESTRA: He sacrificed her.

ELECTRA: Who did?

CLYTEMNESTRA: Your father; Agamemnon. Her father too.

ELECTRA: Why?

CLYTEMNESTRA: The fleet was becalmed – the entire fleet of ships bearing Grecian soldiers to the shores of Troy was stuck in the port of Aulus. They could neither go to war nor could they go home. Soon the word went round it was the goddess Artemis who was behind it. Because of a grudge against Agamemnon, she would not permit a wind to blow. Many years before he had killed one of her stags, and when she complained he boasted he would kill a hundred more. He was full of such boasts! But you should not play such games with the Gods. Artemis bided her time. She waited years for that right moment when she had him, leading his fleet of war to Troy. Beccalmed them. Forced him into a dreadful bargain. A life for a life. In return for her stag, his beautiful daughter. His brother Menelaus had two sons. Why not one of them? They were the sons of Helen who was the cause of the war in the first place. But no. The God of Death desired to feast on one of mine. Agamemnon took his sword and put it to the neck of Iphigenia. No sooner did he cut than a wind got up. (Pause) Monstrous. Criminal. For the sake of war, he slaughtered his daughter and betrayed me. After that I wanted only one thing – to be revenged. Do you understand me better now?

ELECTRA does not speak. She is sullen and silent, sitting very still.

CLYTEMNESTRA: I am sorry to have had to tell you this, Electra. It was your own actions forced me to it. But now that you know the truth, perhaps you will be reconciled with the family that remains to you. Come back into the palace, Electra. When Aegisthus returns, let him find you no longer at the gates. Let us begin our life anew. Good girl . . . Say something, Electra. Speak.

ELECTRA does not speak. Her expression shows no remorse, no change of heart. It is a look of contempt. seeing it, **CLYTEMNESTRA** loses her composure, speaks haughtily.

CLYTEMNESTRA: I command you to speak.

But she doesn't speak, instead **CLYTEMNESTRA** is confronted by the eyes of **ELECTRA** and each of the **CHORUS**, looking into her. She backs away from them, afraid and angry. She shouts out to the **CHORUS**, trying to justify herself.

CLYTEMNESTRA: She snatched my son Orestes from out of my arms. Gave him away to a wild man.

ELECTRA: Because you were going to kill him. Just as you killed my father.

CLYTEMNESTRA looks ready to strike, but the **CHORUS** restrain her.

CHORUS: Perhaps best to hear her out . . .

CLYTEMNESTRA: Who are you talking to?

CHORUS: Your Great Highness.

CLYTEMNESTRA: That's better.

ELECTRA: It wasn't out of a longing for justice that you resolved

to kill him. It was through the suggestion of that criminal you now live with.

CLYTEMNESTRA lunges forward at **ELECTRA**. The **CHORUS** intervene.

CHORUS: Its just her way of expressing things. She's always in such a fury.

CLYTEMNESTRA: She gives you the wrong impression of Aegisthus. He is a man of great affection. I have his children too.

ELECTRA: Not for long.

CLYTEMNESTRA: What do you mean?

ELECTRA: Revenge will soon be here.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Who told you this?

ELECTRA: You'd like to know, I know you all refer to me as the crazy one. But I have my sources.

CLYTEMNESTRA: What sources?

ELECTRA: My sources and my powers at my disposal.

CLYTEMNESTRA: What powers? Are you in contact with Orestes? Speak girl. I command you. (**Looking at CHORUS**.) And who are these people who are always around you?

ELECTRA: Don't blame them. They are just bystanders. They have nothing to do with it. Its just you and I. It's your own actions that compel mine. Evil begets evil.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Wicked little bitch.

ELECTRA: Call me what you like. Selfish. Wicked. A liar. Unjust. Everyone will recognise it. Like mother, like daughter.

CLYTEMNESTRA: For the last time; are you going to come back inside the palace or are you not?

ELECTRA: Not.

CLYTEMNESTRA: You realise you will suffer for this defiance?
When Aegisthus returns . . .

ELECTRA: Yes. I know I will suffer. Each and every citizen of Argos
knows it too.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Is there no limit to what you will try to do?

ELECTRA: None.

CLYTEMNESTRA: I came out here to talk to you, to try to reason
with you. To tell you the truth about your father. Instead you
have twisted every word I said. How can you do this to me
Electra? I am your mother.

ELECTRA: (laughs) Ha!

CLYTEMNESTRA: That settles it. (Pause) If Agamemnon acted
with regret, then so must I. I must now make my offerings at
the altar of Apollo. At least let me do that in peace.

ELECTRA: Go ahead. Make your sacrifice. I'll not say another
word. You'll not say I stopped you when you tried to reach
the Gods.

**ELECTRA says nothing. She and the CHORUS withdraw a
little. CLYTEMNESTRA is left alone.**

CLYTEMNESTRA: Great God I hold the richest fruits on high to
you that you might see them as I make my prayer . . . Phoebus
Apollo, God who protects us, hear me . . . Though I cannot
speak my fears aloud, please hear what I am saying silently. If
the strange dream I've had betokens good for me, stand not
in its way. But if it is a sign of bad for me, deflect it and send it
on my enemies. And so I prepare the sacrifice. One other
matter, before I make this sacrifice, I dare not speak aloud, but
you know what is in my heart, and why. It might seem at first
an evil prayer, but you are a God and you know well that what

sometimes seems as bad within the human sphere, is often for the good. Please grant this final prayer. Yet keep my secret.

She prays.

CHORUS: Nothing is hidden from the sons of Zeus.

CLYTEMNESTRA makes her sacrifice. TUTOR enters. Stops short when he sees CLYTEMNESTRA.

TUTOR: This is the palace of Aegisthus?

CHORUS: Yes, this is it.

TUTOR: And that woman there – such a fine woman – is she the Queen?

CHORUS: She is indeed the Queen. What business have you with her?

TUTOR: I have important news that I must tell to her myself. If you would convey my presence to her, I would be most obliged. Please tell her I am sent by Phanoteous of Phokis.

CLYTEMNESTRA comes forward.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Phanoteous? He is one of our allies. You are welcome. What news do you bring?

TUTOR: It concerns your son, Orestes.

CLYTEMNESTRA: (she is momentarily shocked) So soon. Great Apollo? So soon have you answered my prayers? (To TUTOR) What about my son?

TUTOR: It is my unfortunate duty to inform you . . .

CLYTEMNESTRA: Is he dead?

TUTOR: Sadly so, great queen.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Are you certain?

TUTOR: Yes, great Clytemnestra. Orestes is dead,

ELECTRA: What?

The TUTOR turns sharply towards her.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Take no notice of her.

ELECTRA: Orestes is dead, you say? You're talking nonsense.

What proof do you have?

TUTOR: Only what these eyes have seen.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Don't answer her questions.

ELECTRA: Take care what you say, old man.

The TUTOR looks to CLYTEMNESTRA for guidance.

TUTOR: I have given you the message, most noble lady. Perhaps you are too much in sorrow to wish me to talk more.

ELECTRA: If Orestes is dead, I have nothing left to live for.

CLYTEMNESTRA: No. Please do tell more. To all of us. If my dear son, Orestes, is dead, it is important that we know he is dead, beyond all doubt. All of us. You say you saw it with your own eyes. What did you see? Stand back, Electra. Leave the old man free to tell what he knows.

ELECTRA withdraws a bit from him, but does not take her eyes off him.

TUTOR: I wonder if news has reached Argos about a certain chariot race in which recently a charioteer died whom no-one could identify.

CLYTEMNESTRA: I hear nothing of chariot races. If my husband Aegisthus were here, he doubtless would have heard. Do any of you know of it?

CHORUS: Yes, Your Majesty, the story has spread. No-one knew the name of the man who died. His features were so torn and broken, no-one could recognise his face.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Oh!

TUTOR: Forgive me, great Queen.

CLYTEMNESTRA: You are only the bearer of news. This unknown charioteer – he was Orestes?

The TUTOR nods.

ELECTRA: How do you know? You said he was unrecognisable.

TUTOR: Some of us knew. It was his habit to enter into chariot races without revealing his true name. His prowess was such, you see, that others would not race with him, knowing only too well they would be defeated. Besides which, on his left middle finger, there was a ring . . .

ELECTRA draws her breath, she seems to know about this ring.

TUTOR: A ring with an emblem on it, which we who knew him recognised. There is no doubt it was Orestes. I wish I could tell you otherwise. We knew before the race began Orestes was the unknown contender. And we knew when it ended but did not speak at the time, intending to bring the news first here to Argos. Oh, that it happened so late in the race! His chariot hit a pillar. The axle shaft was split in two and he was flung headlong, his body tangled in the reins. The horses ran amok across the course, dragging him behind them. Oh . . .

ELECTRA: Where is his body now?

TUTOR: Those of us who knew and loved him took his body away. We had no option but to burn it on a funeral pyre. An emissary from Phokis is bringing the ashes here in an urn. A small

container for such a big man. We hoped his ashes would be accepted here for burial in his native land.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Of course, of course. It was all a great mistake he did not grow to manhood here at home. He was sent away for his protection from our enemies. Did he ever speak of Argos?

TUTOR: I only heard him speak but once of Argos. He said he had no memory of it. He said he had a tutor but he is long since dead.

CLYTEMNESTRA: (**to attendant and guard**) Bring the old man into the palace. Aegisthus will return soon, old man, and you must dine with us.

They exit. ELECTRA and CHORUS remain behind.

ELECTRA: Did you see her? Did you hear her? She heard the news that her son had died, yet, when she left she was smiling. Orestes is dead! Carry the news throughout the city. Orestes is dead. And with him all our hopes.

CHORUS: Our ancient line of kings comes to an end with this misfortune.

They exit

ELECTRA: Come Gods of Darkness, help me hide in my despair, dwell in its hollows, beyond any thought of hope, invulnerable. Can you hear me, father?

No, you cannot.

My words sink into the city's stones.

No echo. Not even the nightingale.

Orestes! You were my last hope. Your death also kills me. All that's left to me now is a life in bondage to those I hate. There

is no justice. There is no further chance of justice, nowhere now that I can turn. I am alone.

She looks around her in the darkness. She sees figures in the shadows. She hears her own voice when she was young.

ELECTRA: Here! Here! Take my brother Orestes. He is in mortal danger.

If you honour my father then be tutor to his son. But take him far from here . . .

VOICE OF AGAMEMNON: The princess mourns forever because she murdered her son.

VOICE OF GODDESS: In return for the life of that stag, I demand the life of your daughter.

ELECTRA: (in present) Iphigenia.

CHORAL VOICE: It comes to all that they must die.

ELECTRA: Yes, but not like that, not trampled under the hoof of horses, not dragged along, entangled in the reins . . . not laid down without a sister to hold him at the end . . . no-one to pay him tribute . . .

CHORAL VOICE: It comes to all.

ELECTRA: But not in exile.

CHORAL VOICE: Once there was a king of old
whose wife killed him
for the love of gold . . .

ELECTRA: Oh . . . oh . . . oh . . . oh . . .

CHORAL VOICE: Yet though he's dead . . . yet though he's dead . . . he lives like a king in the world below . . .

ELECTRA sinks down in misery. Enter CHRYSO THEMIS.

CHRYSOTHEMIS: Such good news, sister. He is back with us.

ELECTRA: Who?

CHRYSOTHEMIS: Orestes.

ELECTRA: Have you gone mad?

CHRYSOTHEMIS: Orestes is back among us.

I know it as sure as I know I'm standing here in front of you now. I swear – on our fathers grave – that Orestes is here. Close by.

ELECTRA: What makes you say this with such certainty?

CHRYSOTHEMIS: I can feel him. I know he is near. I went to Agamemnon's tomb, just as you said, to make offerings from you and I, but, when I got there I saw that someone had been there before me. An offering of milk had been poured on the mound. The mound itself was wreathed with flowers. And there, in the centre of it all, a lock of hair, just freshly cut. I picked it up. Held it between my fingers. Mesmerised. My mind filled up with pictures, my eyes with tears. This was a lock of our dear brother's hair. Take heart from it, Electra.

ELECTRA: Orestes is dead. An old man came and told us, just an hour ago. Orestes is dead. He was killed in an accident in a chariot race. The old man told us.

CHRYSOTHEMIS: The old man was mistaken.

ELECTRA: He knew him well. . .

CHRYSOTHEMIS: All right then – the old man lied.

ELECTRA: Why should he lie about Orestes' death?

CHRYSOTHEMIS: Why indeed? (**ELECTRA is confused by this.**) And who left the offerings at Agamemnon's grave?

ELECTRA: An emissary is coming with Orestes' ashes, perhaps it was he.

CHRYSOTHEMIS: To have gone to such trouble? I don't think so.
Such marks of respect on a grave are made only by a son.

ELECTRA is confused by this. For a moment, she hesitates, but then she is resolute, annoyed at herself for having been momentarily taken in by CHRYSOTHEMIS.

ELECTRA: No! No! No! No! Why you had almost for a moment taken me in. You know he is alive because – inside you – you can feel it. Well, inside me, Orestes I can feel that he is dead. The old man knew him alright. He knew about the tutor. He even saw the ring on the dead man's finger – the very ring I gave him so many years ago, before he left. Orestes is dead alright. Make no mistake about it. Get it in your silly head. Orestes is dead. From now on it is up to us what happens. There is no hope left. (Pause) Marry me, Chrysothemis.

CHRYSOTHEMIS: What?

ELECTRA: For all these years now you have not been allowed to marry, because Aegisthus fears our offspring would avenge us. But we are not temple virgins or priestess of the oracle. We are women forced to be barren. That is why you dress up so. Curl your hair and wear your baubles. It is because you long to be a bride. Well, marry me, Chrysothemis. Let the outrage done to our female nature unite us, and let the corpse of Aegisthus be our firstborn child. Join with me, Chrysothemis. Together we can kill them – both.

Throughout the preceding speech, CHRYSOTHEMIS has backed away from her.

CHRYSOTHEMIS: You're mad.

ELECTRA: You are useless.

CHRYSOTHEMIS: I could be useful to you, if you would just listen.

ELECTRA: I've listened enough to the likes of you. Get out of my sight.

CHRYSOTHEMIS: I am trying to help you, Electra.

ELECTRA: Amazing; isn't it? How one person can be so right-thinking and at the same time, so very very wrong.

CHRYSOTHEMIS: Yes. Electra. It is strange. So right-thinking and yet so wrong – that's exactly what I think about you.

She exits. ELECTRA withdraws, sits down.

CHORUS: Speak voice
only the dead
can hear.

Tell the King.
Tell Agamemnon

Of suffering
and sorrow
dishonour
and shame.

Tell
the son of
Atreus.

Speak voice
only the dead
can hear.

Tell Agamemnon.

Tell him indeed
his house is in ruins.
It might have held
but his daughters divided –
days of childhood love forgotten

in an argument they can't restore.

ELECTRA: Come Gods of Darkness,
I need your powers.
Help me feed on my despair
to give me the strength
to kill.

Scene 7

Reprise of earlier imagery. The bars of a gate, an urn, the dark hole that is the entrance to a tomb, a bunch of flowers, an axe. Enter PYLADES. He picks up the urn. Exits.

ORACLE: Not by raising armies
does the battle conclude.
An urn full of ashes
is misunderstood.
The King's son proceeds
by subterfuge.

Arrival of ORESTES with the urn. ELECTRA is sitting with the members of the CHORUS around her. She is cast down, depressed. Enter ORESTES and PYLADES. ORESTES carries the urn.

ORESTES: Good women, I am sorry to disturb you. It seems I come upon you in a solemn mood.

CHORUS: What seek you, stranger?

ORESTES: The palace of Queen Clytemnestra.

CHORUS: And what is your business?

ORESTES: I must deliver this urn to the Queen.

ELECTRA gets up. Confronts ORESTES.

ELECTRA: What does it contain?

ORESTES: Alas! The ashes of her son, Orestes.

ELECTRA: Well might you say alas! Give them to me.

ORESTES: I am to give them to the Queen.

ELECTRA: Let me hold them just for a moment.

ORESTES hesitates. Looks to PYLADES for guidance.

ELECTRA: Give them to me.

PYLADES nods. Very carefully, ORESTES hands the urn to ELECTRA.

ELECTRA: A light burden for you, but a heavy one for me to bear.

(She holds the urn in her hands now.) To think such a small vessel can hold all that remains of such a great man.

ORESTES Is startled by this. He looks at her in amazement.

ELECTRA speaks directly to the urn, clasping it to her body.

ELECTRA: So this is what's become of you, Orestes. I held you then as I hold you now. Yet all your young lifetime has passed in between. All your young lifetime has passed. (Pause) I often thought of you, wondered what you were doing. I sent you messages on the wind . . .

Can you hear me now? Are you with our father? All these years I have waited for your return, but never dreamt it would be like this. Always I was fearful that our enemies would claim you, but not an accident, as I've been told, a chariot race – I never thought. So intent was I on our revenge, I forgot the rest of life goes on. And death. (Pause) What is an accident? If the Gods surround us, can there be such a thing? Or did you do

it deliberately, rather than do what was bequeathed to you – an act so dreadful it would have brought down on you all of the wrath of the merciless Furies? Instead of your mother's life, you took your own. Is that how it was?

ORESTES: No.

ELECTRA: What would you know about it? Hold your tongue.

PYLADES steps forward. ELECTRA gives him the urn.

ELECTRA: Farewell, Orestes. This is the second time I give you into another's arms, but this time there is no return from it.

ORESTES: Electra!

ELECTRA: How do you know my name?

ORESTES: These words are not appropriate.

ELECTRA: What can you mean?

ORESTES holds out his hand and shows her his ring.

ELECTRA: You? You are Orestes? (She touches him. She touches his face.) Yes! You are! You are! Oh, my darling. Orestes; my love. What kept you so long?

She is very excited now. She calls out to the CHORUS, who return, as does PYLADES.

ELECTRA: Look my friends, friends of Argos, look – it is Orestes. It was just a device that he was dead. Now a device has brought him back to us.

ORESTES: Someone might hear. You must control yourself.

ELECTRA: But how can I control myself? I'm just so glad to see you. How can I look at you – safe home – and hold my tongue. It's more than I ever dared hope for.

ORESTES: You should have seen me before now. It was only when the Gods commanded it that I came.

ELECTRA: That makes me even happier because it proves the Gods are definitely on our side.

ORESTES: Your happiness is so difficult to resist, but even so, we mustn't savour it too long, it's very risky.

ELECTRA: Orestes, I've waited so long for this moment . . .

ORESTES: What is it?

ELECTRA: Please don't check my happiness.

My friends! My friends! Rejoice with me! For he has returned to me – behold my own Orestes! This is he!

CHORUS: Noble in spirit spurns

a life ignoble
splattered in shame.

Noble in spirit
chooses honour.

As you, our daughter,
stayed true to your father,
thereby accepting
a life of daily suffering
– anything but dishonour –
you are famous twice over
once for your courage
twice for your right-thinking.

We'll maybe see you win out yet,
raised up high
above all their heads,
holding anew the power and wealth
they'd robbed you of.

Sorrow is all you've known
yet you were faithful to

the unwritten laws of Zeus,
and so your suffering is
crowned with glory.

Enter the TUTOR.

TUTOR: Have you all gone mad? What a racket Orestes! What were you thinking of?

ORESTES: She knows who I am.

TUTOR: I know that. I could hear you a mile off. Clytemnestra has gone to rest. Unless you have disturbed her. Word came from Aegisthus. He's expected back at any moment.

ELECTRA: Who is this man?

ORESTES: Don't you recognise him? He was that wildman in the woods, into whose hands you entrusted me, for him to be my lifelong tutor.

ELECTRA: You? You are he? The only one of Agamemnon's subjects to stay loyal? Oh but you have grown so old. Let me bow down and worship you!

She prostrates herself at his feet. The TUTOR jumps back from her.

TUTOR: Can you not stop her, Orestes? There are things to do.

ORESTES: So what should we do?

TUTOR: You are the man. You make the decisions now.

ORESTES hesitates. He looks around them all. He hears the voice of the ORACLE.

ORACLE: The King's son proceeds by subterfuge.

Who kills the Queen?

Orestes.

CHORUS: Aegisthus approaches!

ORESTES: Electra, be sure your face doesn't radiate happiness as it does at the moment.

ELECTRA: Don't worry, when we encounter Aegisthus and my mother, my face won't be joyous, no fear. I hate them too much for that. And I will shed tears – tears of joy because you have returned – but that pair will not know the cause of them.

ORESTES: That will not be necessary. If we destroy Aegisthus, it might not even be necessary to kill our mother.

ELECTRA: That is not so, Orestes. She must die too . . .

TUTOR: Would you wheesht the pair of you. He's almost upon us . . . Wail, women, wail . . .

The CHORUS start wailing. Enter AEGISTHUS.

AEGISTHUS: What's all this?

CHORUS: Orestes is dead.

AEGISTHUS: So I've been told. And these must be the men from Phokis. Did you bring Orestes ashes?

ORESTES: Within this urn.

He hands the urn to AEGISTHUS.

AEGISTHUS: He died in a chariot race. I heard about that. An unknown charioteer. My men were telling me about it. So that was Orestes? Are you sure?

TUTOR: There is no doubt about it.

AEGISTHUS: Where is Electra.

CHORUS: She is here, King Aegisthus. Grief has silenced her.

AEGISTHUS: That makes a change. Oh, but, alas. Where is

Clytemnestra? Does she know this news?

TUTOR: Yes, great King, but she has not yet held his ashes. She gave me to sup in the palace and then she retired – to mourn her dead son, no doubt.

AEGISTHUS: And, though not of my flesh, he was my son too, because he was Clytemnestra's son. So must we all mourn. His ashes must be put on public display so that all might know that Orestes is dead. Electra, what a terrible moment this is for you . . . Can you really have nothing to say?

ELECTRA: Always I hoped and prayed for his return, as you well know.

AEGISTHUS: Yet, in your grief you talk more sensibly than you did before.

ELECTRA: My sorrow runs so deep, I am surprised I can find words at all. Yet this I have to say to you, Aegisthus. For as much as I have railed against you in the past, forgive me, please. My intolerance was nought but folly. It has taken my brother's death to reveal this to me. Forgive me.

AEGISTHUS: Oh, that won't be necessary. Especially not with strangers present. What will they think of us? (**To GUARDS**) You may go now, good men, for you have been marching since morning. Leave a family alone in its mourning. (**Exit the GUARDS**) Let us go inside then. Electra? You are coming, too?

ELECTRA: I will join you shortly, after I have said goodby to my friends. I will no longer be spending time with them out here on the street.

AEGISTHUS: Excellent! Excellent! And so out of sadness, harmony arises. Come, good friends. (**To ORESTES and PYLADES**) You two look like strong, fighting men.

Scene 8

AEGISTHUS, ORESTES and the TUTOR enter into the palace together.

ORACLE: The axe shaft is waiting
for vengeful hands.

The axe head
longs to fall
and fell
the foul usurper.

CHORUS: Oh see the War Lord make his way
violent and implacable.
Whilst hot for Justice
the Furies come
to lodge in this cursed castle.
They're here to stay.
I hear them bay, hounds upon
the stench of crime.

ELECTRA: I will soon see
my soul's ache
find fulfilment.

Orestes raises the axe . . .
The very axe Aegisthus raised with which to
fell Agamemnon.
They stand upon the very spot . . .
The very spot where they hacked him
down . . . Pylades has the knife in hand . . .
The selfsame knife with which my mother stabbed
my father . . . Aegisthus looks round them . . . fear
in his eyes . . . suddenly he realises their
betrayal . . . He runs . . .
Don't let him escape!

A howl from AEGISTHUS. His body comes crashing through the entrance to the palace. ORESTES and PYLADES fall on top of him, completing the job. The TUTOR is already procuring a sheet from one of the CHORUS. Enter CLYTEMNESTRA.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Aegisthus? (She sees the body covered in the sheet, the rest of them gathered round.) What's this?

TUTOR: There's been an accident, Your Majesty. Or, I should say, a slight mistake. I thought they were bringing Orestes' ashes but in fact his body was not put on the pyre after all. This is it here.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Orestes? This is the body of my son, Orestes?

ORESTES: Yes.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Where is Aegisthus? He should be back by this time.

ORESTES: He has been delayed.

CLYTEMNESTRA: And who are you?

ORESTES: I am from Phokis. Myself and my companion brought your beloved son's body.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Very well. I might as well get it over with. Let me look upon my son . . .

The TUTOR pulls back the sheet.

CLYTEMNESTRA: I can't see his face. (Pause) Those are Aegisthus' clothes. Oh! My darling! My darling! They have murdered you! My darling! (She is embracing the dead body. But she stops now and turns round on them with a fierce eye.) What kind of treachery is this? (She stands up. Everyone backs away from her, apart from ELECTRA and ORESTES.) You little bitch! He was right about you. I should

have let him lock you away, the very first time he suggested it. (Turns to ORESTES.) And you? Who are you? No. Don't bother to say. You are my son, Orestes. So you've finally deigned to return after all these years! What kind of love is this you bring home to your mother? You are sick, boy. Your jealousy has driven you to this terrible deed. Hang your head in shame. Only my compassion can save you now. (She turns towards the entrance to the palace.) Call the King's Guards.

ELECTRA: There are no guards.

CLYTEMNESTRA: You dare to speak to me?

ELECTRA: Yes. I dare to speak to you.

CLYTEMNESTRA: Haven't you done enough to me? You have killed the man I love. What more can you do to me? Unless, of course, you have decided to also murder me, your own mother – you and Orestes together. Is that it? I should think not. The Furies would never forgive you. They would take a most emphatic revenge.

ELECTRA: Let us discuss it inside the palace.

CLYTEMNESTRA: What about you, Orestes? Are you coming too? Or did you do enough damage on your first visit?

Pause. ORESTES looks from CLYTEMNESTRA to ELECTRA. He turns to the TUTOR, PYLADES, the CHORUS, but no-one can help him in his decision.

CLYTEMNESTRA: It will soon be dark.

ORESTES: Yes. I am coming too.

CLYTEMNESTRA goes into the palace, followed by ELECTRA and ORESTES.

CHORUS: Her son's hands touch her.

Why does she scream?
Who killed the King?
The Queen.
Who kills the Queen?
Electra and Orestes . . .

Scream from CLYTEMNESTRA.

CHORUS: There is a curse on the House of Atreus.

A curse that continues on through time.
Violence begets violence. Blood spills more blood.
Each act of revenge is yet another crime.

ELECTRA and ORESTES emerge from the palace. They stand there, covered in blood.

End

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David Greig

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Robert Thomson, Herald

. . . an incisive exploration of the relationship between character and fate.

Sue Wilson, Independent

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Simon Donald

Sex, drugs and Frank Sinatra: The Life of Stuff is a brilliantly funny fly-on-the-wall snapshot of eight lives careering out of control as small-time crook and aspirant pharmaceutical entrepreneur Willie Dobie's best laid plans unravel when human nature takes its predictably unpredictable course . . . In common with a number of first-rate modern Scottish plays The Life of Stuff has, as yet, only received two professional productions. I fervently hope this new publication will lead to the wider recognition it deserves.

Hugh Hodgart, Head of Acting at RSAMD, Glasgow

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Julie Morrice, Scotland on Sunday

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Rhiannon Tise

The Waltzer is a touching and sensitive exploration of the serious business of growing up. A world of beleaguered single parents and adolescent fears and friendships is reflected in the dark mirror of Sally's experience on her first real date. The garish glamour and hectic motion of the fairground and the Waltzer itself provide a perfect setting for this multi-faceted depiction of the thrills and spills of a teenager's first steps towards the adult world. Written for radio, The Waltzer draws much of its power and point from the complex interaction between past and present events, inner monologue and intercut dialogue. In our film and TV dominated culture we can easily miss out on the imaginative strength of radio drama - the publication of this play is a timely reminder of the real alternatives to the siren call of MTV, Cartoon Network and the Disney Channel.

Hugh Hodgart, Head of Acting at RSAMD, Glasgow

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King Matt

Stephen Greenhorn

King Matt, the story of a boy who becomes a king, is a simple fable filled with surprisingly complex resonances. In common with the very best in storytelling for children, it confronts the big moral issues surrounding the way in which one makes one's way in the world and through life: self-interest vying with self-sacrifice, the greed of the individual with the needs of the collective. The boy-king Matt is undoubtedly the hero of the tale but it is his human faults and frailties as well as his intrepid spirit that keep us on the edge of our seats right up to the suspense-filled ending. This is a play written for children that children would have great fun playing for themselves.

Hugh Hodgart, Head of Acting at RSAMD, Glasgow

A highly articulate play that speaks volumes about the nature of democracy and personal responsibility.

The Stage

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Dr Korczak's Example

David Greig

Dr Korczak's Example is set in the final, numbered, days of an orphanage in the Warsaw ghetto in 1942. Based on real events, this 'Brechtian' retelling generates an almost unbearable power and pathos through the simple humanity, warts and all, of the central characters who are trapped both by the inexorable forces of Nazi oppression and by our fore-knowledge of the fate that awaits them. The play's 'alienation' device of depicting its characters through the use of dolls, further enhances our painful feeling of powerlessness. Yet, in spite of its tragic outcome, Dr Korczak's Example, like the real life of its protagonist, leaves us exhilarated and uplifted by the indomitable power of love.

Hugh Hodgart, Head of Acting at RSAMD, Glasgow

This is the dramatist's art turned to serve an idea of theatre which is unreplicable in any other medium – a play not to forget.

Will Hutton, The Observer

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Sunburst Finish

Andrea Gibb
Paddy Cunneen

‘Note to self. You are dying.’ As a young man’s depression turns to despair, suicide seems the only way out - the only way to take control. In spite of the bleakness of its subject, *Sunburst Finish* is filled with strong and vibrant voices, a rich mosaic of music, wit, warmth, insight, feeling, and a remarkable lack of sentimentality. The central character’s struggle to come to terms with himself and the world around him is one that all young (and not so young) people will relate strongly to.

Hugh Hodgart, Head of Acting at RSAMD, Glasgow

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Kaahini

Maya Chowdhry

Kaahini is a highly original yet thoroughly accessible insight into what it means to be young, Asian and British. Filled with the powerful and contradictory emotions of adolescence, Kaahini is brightly coloured, full of warmth and feeling, and shot through with the darker threads of frustration and anger at the inflexible and inexplicable adult world. This play, for all its seemingly unfamiliar Asian context, speaks directly to the widest possible audience: anyone with a mother, father, son, daughter, friend or lover will find much to challenge and inspire them here.

Hugh Hodgart, Head of Acting at RSAMD, Glasgow

Maya Chowdhry's Kaahini is a surprising, tender and beautifully observed play, which manages the elusive feat of exploring gender and cultural politics in a thought-provoking way without ever distracting from the passionate heart of its story. A play which deserves to be seen by as many young people as possible.

John E McGrath, Artistic Director, Contact, Manchester

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Shakespeare The Director's Cut

Michael Bogdanov

This collection of cutting-edge essays is a valuable addition to Shakespeare studies, and to theatre studies more generally. Michael Bogdanov's cuts are always incisive, razor-sharp, and applied with an unerring hand. Never dogmatic or programmatic, Bogdanov approaches each play attentive to its novelty and its nuances, alive to its urgency and impact, attuned to its language and its lore. As a director acutely aware of critical conventions - enough to want to overturn them - Bogdanov is uniquely positioned to combine theoretical acuity with a practitioner's knowledge of what works on the page and in performance, while never losing sight of what is most politically resonant and socially engaged. The meat is moist closest to the bone, and these are choice cuts from a master butcher.

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His *Electra* is self-righteously correct, mad and disastrous. His *Orestes*, rather than god-enlightened, is a hesitant teenager blinded by a vision of new beginnings. All the characters have a dubious mixture of self-deluding, self-interested and high-minded motives. All are fatally credulous, believing messengers and messages even less reliably credentialled than CNN, Fox or the BBC. This piece zings with more compressed meaning than many ten times its length. It resonates powerfully for all of us watching similar stories unfolding in the Middle East, Congo, Rwanda, the USA and Northern Ireland.

Bob Tait, theatre reviewer and literary critic

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